

MITRA

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A NOTE ON A CURE-CHARM FOR THE BITE OF THE BODĀ SNAKE.

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(Read on 28th April 1915.)

I have recently come into possession of a small lithographed book of charms. Portions of its text are in Hindi; while the language of most of the *mantrams* or incantations published therein is Bengali. The compiler of this work explains this by saying that "the magical arts of Bengal are very famous and that, for this reason, the majority of the incantations set forth therein are from Bengal." (बंगाले का जादू मशहूर है; इस कारण ज्यादेतर बंगाले के ही मंत्र यहां लिखैंगे।)

I have gleaned from this strange medley of charms the undernoted cure-charm or incantation for exorcising away the venom from a person who has been bitten by a *Bodā* snake. It is a kind of snake found in Bengal. But I am unable, at present, to give its scientific name. I give below the text, together with the translation, of this cure-charm, supplemented with some notes on the noteworthy features thereof :—

बोडा सांप का विष उतारना।

नीचे लिखा मंत्र पढ़कर रोगी को बांम के छपर सुनावै।

और जल सार अर्थात् बराबर शिरपर पानी डालै।

मंत्र।

श्री हरि श्री हरि बल ओरे आमार भाई।

कामाख्या मायेर बरे बोडा विष नाई॥

नीछक विषेर जोर आर नाई विष।

प्रसाद दिवरे तोरे छार बाइ रिश॥

5 सबर्बे काजे मनशा पूजा दिव दुध कला ।
 महेक नहक कर गई मार बाला ॥
 चंद्र सूर्य साज्जी भाई आमार बाकी सार ।
 ईम्बर भैरबेर किरे शीघ्र ऐसे घर ॥
 पानकर भैरु ठाकुर निबड़ आचिल ।

10 ध्यां ध्यां ध्यां निहत न्हईल ॥
 आय आय बर शिव छापार छाना शत ।
 आमार एइ जलसारे विष न्हईल न्हत ॥
 नाइ विष नाइ विष ।

14 कार आज्जे कौरु पीरेर आज्जे ॥

Translation.

INCANTATION FOR EXORCISING AWAY THE
 VENOM OF THE *Bodā* SNAKE.

[The person bitten (by the *Bodā* snake) should be made to lie on his left side, while the undernoted incantation is being recited. And the charmed water should be all along poured over his head.]

TEXT OF THE INCANTATION.

1. O my brother ! Utter the name of *Srî Hari*.
2. The venom of the *Bodā* snake has disappeared by the blessing of Mother *Kāmākhyā*.
3. The venom and its potency have all gone.
4. I shall give thee offerings.
5. O goddess *Manashā* ! I shall worship thee with offerings of milk and plantains on all (festive) occasions.
6. Do not disappoint me.
7. O brother ! The Sun and the Moon are my witnesses.
8. I adjure thee with the name of *Tambar Bhairab*. Come home soon.
9. O *Bhairu Thākur* ! Drink the remainder of my charmed water,

10. *Dhyāng ! dhyāng ! thayāng ! thayāng !* The hundred young ones of the snake have been killed.

11. Come, come, O blessing of Siva.

12. The venom (of the snake) has been nullified under the influence of this my charmed water.

13. The venom no longer exists ; the venom no longer exists.

14. Whose command is this ? This is the command of the Saint of Kourun.

Remarks.

Portions of the phraseology of this *mantram* are unintelligible. For instance, the sense of the words “द्वार बाइ रिश” (in line 4), “गई मार बाला” (in line 6) and “निबड आचिल्ल” (in line 9) cannot be made out by me. I have translated the words “महेक नहक कर” (in line 6) into “Do not disappoint me.” I have taken the word “छापार” (in line 11) as being a provincialism for “सापेर” which means “of the snake.”

The most noteworthy features of the aforementioned cure-charm are :—(a) The invocation to Mother Kāmākhyā (कामाख्या मा); (b) the invocation to Manashā (मनशा); (c) the allusion to Tambar Bhairab (टम्बर भैरब) and Siva (शिव); (d) the invocations to भैरु ठाकुर (Bhairu Thākur) and (e) to कौंरु पीर (the Saint of Kounrū).

Now the question arises :—Why have the aforesaid deities, goddesses and saint been invoked ? The reasons are not far to seek.

Now Mother Kāmākhyā is no other than the goddess Kāmākhyā who is the tutelary deity of Assam or Kāmarūpa and whose temple there is one of the holiest pilgrimages of the Hindus. A well-known legend of Hindu mythology states that, when Satī, the spouse of Siva, being deeply mortified by the affront offered by her father Daksha to her husband by not having invited the latter to the famous sacrificial ceremony (यज्ञ) performed by the former, breathed her last, Siva placed

her body upon his trident and whirled it round, whereupon her different limbs became severed from the corpse and fell at different places. Now one of her severed limbs fell in Assam. Hence Assam or Kāmarūpa is regarded by the Hindus as one of their holiest places.

I have already stated in my paper on "*Some Bihāri Mantrams*"¹ that Kāmarūpa, otherwise known as Kāonrū, according to mediæval Hindu traditions, was the home of mighty sorcerers and enchanters and that, therefore, the "spells of Kāmarūpa or Kāmākhyā" were reputed to be very famous throughout Hindudom. It is, for this reason, that the goddess Kāmākhyā has been invoked so that the cure-charm may be very strong and effective.

Siva, Tambara-Bhairaba and Bhairu-Thākur are different appellations of one and the same deity Siva who, in Hindu mythology, is famed to be a great physician. Hence he has been invoked in order that he might lend additional curative power to this incantation. The god Bhairaba is also invoked in the incantation of class II mentioned in my aforementioned paper at page 507 of Vol. IX of this Society's *Journal*.

I have interpreted the words "कौरु परि" as meaning "*the Saint of Kouṇrū*." If my interpretation be correct, they clearly refer to the goddess Kāmākhyā, as Kouṇrū or Kāonrū is a synonym of the place-name Kāmarūpa.

Then we come to the goddess Manashā. In Hindu mythology, she is the sister of Vāsuki the god of snakes and popularly believed, in Bengal, to preside, conjointly with her brother, over snakes. Her father was the great saint Kaśyapa and her mother Kadru. At the behest of the gods, her brother gave away Manashā in marriage to the saint Jaratkāru, in order that the son born of this union might absolve the serpent-race from the curse of destruction that they labored under. In course of time, a son was born to them who afterwards became

¹ Page 509 of the *Bombay Anthropological Society's Journal*, Vol. IX.

famous as the saint Āstika. When King Janamejaya performed the famous sacrificial ceremony (*jajña*) for the extermination of all the snakes, the goddess Manashā sent her son Āstika Muni to prevail upon King Janamejaya to put a stop to the sacrifice. The goddess Manashā has been invoked with a view that she might call upon her myrmidon—the *Bodā* Snake—to take away the poison or to nullify its effect.

The last words of the cure-charm, *viz.*, कार आज्ञे कौंरु पीरे आज्ञे deserve some notice. It is a formula which, under slight modifications, appears in almost all Bengali incantations. In an altered form, it occurs as the finale to the undermentioned incantation which the *ojhā* (or ghost-doctor), in the Rev. Lāl Bihāri De's *Bengal Peasant Life* (Chapter XVI), recites in order to exorcise away the ghost which had possessed the heroine Āduri :—

Dhūlā sattam,
Madhu pattam,
Lādhulā karam sār ;
Āsi hājār koti bandam
5 Teis hājār lār.

Je pathe yāya amuk chhede de kes,
Dāin, yogini, pret, bhūt,
Bāo, bātās, deva, dūt,
Kāhāre nāiko nābaleo.

10 *Kār ājñā ?*

Kānader Kāmākhyā hādijhī Chāndīr ājñā :

12 *Siggir lāg, lāg, lāg.*

The lines 10 and 11 of the cure-charm mean: "Whose command is this ? It is the order of Chāndī (the daughter of a *Hādi*)—the goddess Kāmākhyā." Now Chāndī is the name of an incarnation of Dévī or Durgā or Satī whose victories over the *Asuras* or the enemies of the Aryan settlers in the Panjab, are narrated in the *Chāndī Māhātmya* which forms a portion of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*.

Then arises the question: Why charmed water is poured upon the head of the person bitten by the snake? This is done as water is a protective against the influence of evil spirits or, for the matter of that, against the venom of a snake which is regarded by many races of people as a symbol of the spirit of evil. This idea of the protective power of water underlies all the numerous bathing-and lustration-ceremonies which figure so largely in the every-day lives of the orthodox Hindus throughout India.

It will greatly interest the student of comparative folklore to learn that a cure-charm for the bite of the *Boda* snake, slightly differing from the one discussed *supra*, is current in the district of Murshidabad in Bengal. In this case, the *ojhā* gets on to the thatched roof of the hut (presumably wherein the patient is living) with six water-pots and, while reciting *mantras*, pours the water slowly on to the ground. It is believed that, as the water falls, the patient slowly recovers.¹ The idea, underlying this variant of the cure-charm for the bite of the *Boda* snake, is sympathetic magic or the imitation of a cause to produce a desired effect. Just as an American Indian rain-maker, who mounts to the roof of his hut and violently rattles a dry gourd containing pebbles to represent the thunder and scatters water through a reed on the ground below to symbolize the rain, thinks that he will thereby cause rain to fall.

Similarly the *Ikhrāj* (इखराज or ایکھرائج)—a name given in the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh to the day on which sugar-cane is planted to the accompaniment of the performance of some festive ceremonies—is performed at Delhi with the observance of the undernoted custom at the root of which lies sympathetic magic. The wife of the ploughman, who turns up the ground for the reception of the sugar-cane cuttings, follows a little behind him with a ball of cotton in her hand. At

¹ *A History of Murshidabad District (Bengal).* By Major J. H. Tull Walsh. London: Jarrold and Sons. 1902, pp. 83-84.

some unexpected moment, he turns on her and, after a sham contest, bears her to the ground. The cotton, being forced out of her hand, spreads out upon the ground, whereupon the parties present there exclaim: "May our sugar-cane grow and spread like this cotton."¹

In the same way when, in the districts of Northern India, situated to the east of the river Jumna, the unripe boles of cotton, known as *gheghra* (घेगरा or گھگر), *goolar*, *ghentee* or *bhitna* burst in a field of cotton plants, a ceremony known as the *Phoorukna* is performed in the following way: The largest plant in the field is selected, then sprinkled over with buttermilk and rice-water and, lastly, bound all over with pieces of cotton taken from the other plants in the field. This selected plant is called *Sirdar* or *Bhogaldaee* or Mother-Cotton, from *bhogla*, a name sometimes given to a large cotton-pod and *daee* a mother. Then obeisances are made to it and prayers are offered up to the effect that the other cotton-plants in the field may resemble it in the richness of their produce. Surely, there is sympathetic magic at the basis of this ceremony. It is desired that the other cotton-plants should yield a bumper-crop in the same way that the "Mother-Cotton" has been magically made to do.²

So the root-idea lying at the basis of the Murshidabad cure-charm is that, just as the charmed water poured by the *ojhā* cools the earth, in the same way the pain from which the patient bitten by the *Boda* snake is suffering will be cooled.

¹ *Supplement to the Glossary of Indian Terms.* By H. M. Elliot. Agra: 1845, p. 308.

² *Op. cit.* p. 327.

PREGNANCY (FECUNDITY) AMONGST ANCIENT AND MODERN RACES.

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Among the Hindus, the condition of Pregnancy was regarded with religious respect ; and various rites were actually performed for the safe and sound delivery of the child. Even in our own days, the state of conception is one in which the wife is exalted to a higher position not only in the home but in the society or community to which the family belongs. From the very initial stage of "Garbhádàna"—the securing of conception, the idea of religious sanctity and social adoration was and is predominant, so much so that the wife would be treated with special care concerned by the members of the family and friends and acquaintances alike. The so-called 16 (sixteen) "Samskáras"—purificatory rites—in fact, begin from this stage. (2) The second purificatory rite during the period of pregnancy is called the "Pumsavana" or the rite meant to determine the male sex of the child. It is a belief prevalent in early times and current even now that by performing certain ceremonies, the child in the womb would be turned into a male child, even if perchance it was a female one. The first ceremony that secured conception was also intended for the purpose of securing the child from *internal* and *external* dangers while yet in the womb. (3) The third ceremony was and is named the "Simantonnayana"—celebrating of pregnancy. It is, in fact, the formal declaration that the woman was in a family way ; and that the occasion was one of great rejoicing. The time of celebration differed with different scriptural writers ; and yet all are equally agreed upon the one main point of celebrating the occasion with due "éclat". "Asvaláyana" enjoins the celebration of it during the 4th "Sàṅkhyayana" during the 7th month, and "Gobhila" requires it to be so performed in the 4th, 6th or 8th month, according to individual convenience.

